

□ 1545

If you make that pledge, and by the way, it is a public pledge and your name goes up on a bulletin board, then they take you back in. So it is possible to switch sides. It is possible to come over. And many are coming over to our side. You have to be wondering, Mr. Speaker, then, what are the consequences for one who doesn't keep their word to fight against al Qaeda, to stand on the side of the Iraqi people, the side of U.S. Coalition Forces? I asked that question over there in the briefing. They answered, the penalty is death. They are serious. This is serious business. This is life and death for thousands of people. It is also life and death for a number of nations.

That is a crucible in the world right now where if this place is allowed to melt down, if we pulled out of there, as the gentlewoman recommended, did a pullout of this conflict that is going on, then you look at the void that would be created. Nature abhors a vacuum. Power abhors a vacuum. The struggle there has been a power struggle. Yes, there are different competing philosophies that have lined up in different political spheres. At one time I could list you off about seven different power centers within Iraq that are competing for power. But we don't. We have the Shias and the Sunnis. We have the Badr brigades, and we have Moqtada al-Sadr's JAM brigade, and some that are just plain criminals. And you have the former Baathists, and again the Shias and Sunnis of different stripes, the different allegiances that come out of all of that, they were all competing for power. That is sorting itself out now.

As this power struggle works its way through, as the sheiks line up and decide they are going to cast their lot with the Iraqi nation, the Iraqi Government and the Iraqi people, as well as the U.S. coalition forces, they lined this up. They have done this same kind of thing in Taji in the north. They have done this in the south in Baghdad, and made their agreements where the map of that country today is far more green with very little red in it where al Qaeda has an influence. Some of those places where they have an influence is there because they just simply, the influence is there because al Qaeda has been driven out of some of the other regions and they had to go somewhere, didn't leave the country.

There is reason for optimism. And there always should be cautious optimism when it comes to war. But the other side has reason for pessimism. They have reason to believe that they have been driven out of al-Anbar province. And they have been driven out of many areas of Iraq. The country is safer today than it was a year ago. Much of the country isn't as dangerous as we are lead to believe that it is. I listened to the gentleman from California, Mr. HUNTER's remarks earlier about some State Department personnel who decided they don't want to

go to Iraq because it is too dangerous. Yes, there is danger there, but our military is facing that every day. And they are re-upping in greater numbers than ever imagined. That is why we can keep our recruitment up, because they believe in the mission.

As DUNCAN HUNTER said, when you go to Bethesda or Walter Reed or Landstuhl in Germany and visit our brave wounded there, those that have maybe lost a limb, those that are in a long recovery process, those that may have had a pretty large chunk of shrapnel taken out of them, they want to get back with their unit. They want to finish their mission. Some have gone back with a prosthetic in place of a limb. That is real, true courage and patriotism. These are the people that say, I am a volunteer. I volunteered for this branch of the military at this time. I volunteered for this mission or at least I knew there was a high likelihood I would be deployed to this mission. I want to complete my mission because it is important. It is important for the freedom and the safety of the American people. It is important for freedom in the world. It is important for the dynamics that are taking place in that part of the world today where they realize that if the Iranians are allowed to continue their proxy war against the United States and flow their power over into Iraq, that would fill in the vacuum if we would do as the gentlewoman recommended and immediately pull out. The Iranians would sit astraddle of 42.6 percent of the world's export oil supply. That is not just the valve on the oil; that is the valve on the world's economy. They could control our economy by deciding what comes in and out of the Straits of Hormuz.

We understand that. That was an issue back in 1979 when the U.S. fleet was making sure the straits were kept open. So I want to emphasize that this direction of this battlefield of Iraq, which is a battlefield in the global war on terror, is going in a good direction. If we were to turn our back on all that sacrifice today, I don't know how I would look in the eye of the family members who have lost a son or a daughter over there who tell me, It is different now. The soil in Iraq is sanctified by the blood of my son; that being a son of a gentleman from California whose first name is John, whose last name I have forgotten. He said, You can't pull out now. That soil is sanctified by his blood.

I will stand with them. They are volunteers. The President had to make a decision. He made that decision. This Congress made the same decision, and we ought to have the courage of our convictions and stick by our decision instead of seeking to undermine that effort.

So, Mr. Speaker, I think that addresses the issue of the previous speaker. I have a couple other subject matters that I wanted to bring up here in the time that I have. One of them is

that this Congress is busily overspending again. It has been a constant for a long time. There is something endemic within the electoral process that there are people that believe they need to purchase votes with taxpayer dollars. So they want the programs for their district.

Well, I think the measure of these programs should be measured on a higher standard than what they do for political gain. I think when you look at the earmark system that is here and the larger dollars that go to people that have the seniority, they are on the Appropriations Committee, Republicans or Democrats, you can chart that out and see where the money goes. It goes to the people that are sitting in a position here to broker it into their districts. Now, I have argued many times that there isn't a single constituent in their district that deserves any more representation than the constituents in my district. We each represent 600-some thousand people. I am not quite ready to go the path that we distribute earmarks equally to all population bases in the country. I think they need to be evaluated. I think they need to have sunlight on them. I think the American people have to have an opportunity to look at the spending that goes on in this Congress and evaluate it on a line item by line item basis.

When I first came to the Congress 5 years ago, one of the first big bills to come to me to make a decision on was the 3,600-page omnibus spending bill. I don't know how tall 3,600 pages are, but I imagine it is up there pretty high. We tried to get that information to find out what was in it because we naively thought we were going to analyze the information that was in that bill and the spending that was in that 3,600-page omnibus spending bill. So it finally became available to download it off the Internet. And we began downloading it off, I imagine it was a secure connection over in my office over here in Longworth. As we downloaded it a page at a time, the 3,600th page, the last page became available 20 minutes before the bill was brought up for a final vote on the floor of this Congress. Twenty minutes to evaluate 3,600 pages. Now, that is a daunting task, Mr. Speaker. In fact, it is an impossibility. If I had one person assigned to each page that had a degree in law that could analyze it, I still couldn't get this sorted through and get the response back in 20 minutes. I know there were others who had a head start on this ahead of me. Sometimes you have to take that leap of faith. But the functionality of 20 minutes to analyze a piece of legislation is not the way to do business. And that 20 minutes to analyze what is in it, think, Mr. Speaker, how difficult it is to go through 3,600 pages and find out what is not in it. A far more difficult thing.

Yet, here we in this Congress have worked for a long time to grant the President a line item veto. So the